

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

The UnAustralian Condition: An Essay In Four Parts Eleni Pavlides

Introduction: Perspectivism

My birth was a happy accident which occurred alongside the reactive aftermaths of British colonialism. From very early on Papa taught me off-putting things about the British who were (in Papa's opinion) perfidious in all their habits of colonial government. As a Greek Cypriot he could never forgive the attempted assassination of Archbishop Makarios. However, according to Papa, this duplicity did not extend to the ordinary British soldier who was as much of a victim of the British ruling class as the peoples that they colonised. Unity could be found amongst the common man. It was British soldiers who taught Papa English, allowing him to migrate to Australia as a literate man; an important thing in the 1950s when the post war Greek diaspora populated Melbourne. Befuddled by English documents, mainland Greeks sought out my father to translate papers. Papa took enormous pride in the copperplate writing which the British had taught him. So helpful was Papa's work that it brought him to the attention of Mama's fellow villagers. Having come across such an excellent bachelor who was educated in English, they informed the village and after an exchange of letters and photographs which was brokered by her family, Mama was dispatched to Australia to marry. Shortly afterwards, I was born in Melbourne – a different outpost of the British Empire. Nothing like Cyprus, Melbourne was founded in 1835 by white British settlers. John Batman and his party paid the traditional owners the equivalent of one hundred British pounds for the 2000 square kilometres surrounding the Yarra River. This arrangement was later repudiated. Under the doctrine of *terra nullius* only the British Crown held title to the land. In 1837, the city was officially renamed in honour of the British Prime Minister – Lord Melbourne. By the 1890s, Melbourne flourished and was for a time the second largest city in the Empire. As Craven's introduction to Malouf's essay *Made in England* tells us: 'it was a transplanted form of England itself, and its nineteenth century cities – especially but not simply Melbourne – had the relation to London, the seat of the Empire, that provincial cities like Birmingham and Leeds had'.¹

For my father, relocation to this seat of empire posed a new set of naming and language problems. There were fresh ruptures in the symbolic order. Much to the birth registrar's annoyance, when I was born in Melbourne, Papa refused to name me properly. Honouring hundreds of years of agrarian tradition, he gave his first name as my last since this was custom in his village. I would be known by the patronymic. Thus I would carry the 'name of the father' until I was married and renamed. But here his proper name for me was rendered illegitimate: local nomenclature did not allow for such an overt honouring of the patriarchal bond and I was recorded in the English way. Papa maintained that it was practices such as these that had subjugated the Celtic peoples of Britain long before the British had exported to them to their colonies and dominions. Beaten, he acceded to a new symbolic order: 'What happens when the subjectivity acquired within one symbolic order is lost in another: are we left with an

¹ Peter Craven, 'Introduction', *Quarterly Essay* 12 (2003): iv.

empty space and a vacated subjectivity, a type of *aphanisis* or fading of the subject?’² Etymologically, *aphanisis* derives from the Greek and means to disappear, to become invisible. In psychiatry, *aphanisis* was first defined by Ernest Jones – a follower of Freud – as the inability to enjoy sex, as the *extinction de la capacite de la jouissance*: the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire. Lacan subsequently redefines *aphanisis* as the act of subjective destitution which has its locus in the very moment of the subject’s creation. The signifier of the symbolic ‘I’, its separateness, only comes into being due to the loss of pre-verbal plenitude.

In the white settler mythologies of Australia, the *aphanisis* of the child in the bush, the lost child, established itself as a poignant and enduring image from the nineteenth century onwards.³ Alone in the darkness/vastness of the bush, in fear and confusion, disorientated and completely defenceless, the lost child is pitilessly exposed. With no witness to respond the child becomes invisible; its cries unheard the child disappears, and only suffering remains, circumscribed by the cruelty of a traitorous continent. In 1867, the ‘Three Lost Children’ in Daylesford, Victoria were found dead inside a tree, silently compliant with their betrayer. In luckier circumstances, Jane Duff and her three brothers – bush children lost and found in 1864 – had their narrative commemorated, recalled and reinterpreted within the safer limits of educational films and school readers. Pervasive and enduring, the image of the lost bush child retains its hold on the modern Australian imagination and the unconscious brutality of the act is symbolically perpetuated. Media frenzy surrounding the more recent disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain and films such as *One Night the Moon*⁴ disseminate this Australian anxiety for its contemporary audience, leading one historian to ask: ‘But what is it in our experience of colonisation and settlement that established this image at the core of Australian popular mythology, and why does it retain its potency?’⁵ If the lost child archetype resonates within the settler psyche it is not the only leitmotiv in the gallery of images of unfulfilled promise that haunt the national imaginary, at least amongst the dominant Anglo-Celtic group. Possessively inhabiting that gallery are also the images of the youthful, dying Anzac and the courageous but doomed explorer.

When Mama felt slighted due to her new immigrant status she would come home from the Melbourne factory announcing that she was proud that she had not come to Australia with ‘her hands tied together’ as she called it. For her, unfairness was the natural outcome of Australia’s convict settler past. If you appropriated your ‘home’ from the other and the other still kept place there, then yours was a haunted nation. Should the betrayer not acknowledge the betrayal, then the omission taints all recognition and the stain remains. This is the paradox of fidelity that the betrayed the betrayer share. Non recognition for Mama reflected her tormentors’ own tormenting lack – it was one from which they could not instigate a chronicle of belonging for themselves let alone for new Australians (as they were known back then). Forever

² Sneja Gunew, ‘The Home of Language: A Pedagogy of the Stammer’, in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. S Ahmed, C Castaneda, A Fortier, and M Sheller, (Oxford: Berg, 2003) 46

³ Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ *One Night the Moon*, dir. Rachel Perkins, perf. Kaarin Fairfax, Ruby Hunter, Memphis Kelly, Paul Kelly, Kelton Pell, Music Arts Dance Films, 2001.

⁵ Kim Torney, *Babes in the Bush: The Making of an Australian Image* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005) 11.

tantalizing, always alluring, out of reach, the 'natural inheritance' lives on for the white settler, as a manifest symptom of the '*extinction de la capacite de la jouissance*' – the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire. Meantime, Papa remained much more concerned with the blight of Britishness. Gallipoli and Churchill's abandonment of Australia after the fall of Singapore in WW2 further proved to him the duplicity of British governance. If the subaltern was about race and class for Papa, Mama was thrice denied – for her it was about race, class and gender. As she could not speak English, Mama was tied to speechlessness. Having gained her access to the symbolic order through language she now lost her right to enter.

For a while, like so many immigrants I was in effect without language, and from the bleakness of that condition, I understood how much of our sense of self, depends on having a living speech within us. To lose an internal language is to subside into an inarticulate darkness in which we become alien to ourselves.⁶

This is Polish American writer Eva Hoffman writing about the émigré condition of aphasia. Aphasia is also known as aphemia, both words deriving from the Greek and prefixed by the morpheme 'α' which means without or lacking. Lacan elevated the morpheme α to the status of trope, incorporating into it a psychoanalytical meaning of archetypical lack, a hole of unfillable desire. In a drier definition the *Encyclopædia Britannica* describes aphasia as a condition which impairs the capacity to produce and/or understand language.⁷ Usually, it is a result of damage to the language centres of the brain. For Mama, it was an inverted condition: she lost a language and thus weakened her mind. 'Use it or lose it', they say and named her 'inarticulate darkness' depression. Suffering expressed and articulated is creativity. Neurosis is unexpressed suffering symptomatised across the body/mind. Language is everything. Regardless of which language was used and what was said at home, I went to Australian schools where I learned that I had joined what Churchill termed the English speaking peoples and that: 'the greatest thing about that inheritance is that we speak the language Shakespeare wrote and are inward by our birthright with the glories of that great master of metaphor and association'.⁸

Faithfully, I served my apprenticeship as a colonial Australian, as a Shakespeare Wallah. I wrote eloquently about the creations of 'that great master of metaphor and association'. With alacrity, I embarked on the project of English. It echoed my own trans-generational theme of purgatory and redemption through language. Yet where Craven recalls the bard's Henry V on the field of Agincourt: 'And you, good yeoman, whose limbs were made in England/Show us here the mettle of your pasture',⁹ I took up arms and sided with Papa. I resonated with the rage, suffering, and despair of the bard's articulate and ridiculous Shylock, the voice for the world's first stateless people – the Jews: 'Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means ... If you prick

⁶ Quoted in Gunew 46.

⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 'aphasia' *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* 3 Nov. 2009 <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9007993>.

⁸ Craven iv.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *King Henry the Fifth*, The Alexander Text of William Shakespeare, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1978) III, i, 25-27, 564.

us do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?’¹⁰ I understood the fury of being rendered contemptible – of being unseen and unheard.

‘More than 200 people at the bleak desert centre began a hunger strike eight days ago. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock ordered five children removed from the camp to protect them from having their lips sewn together like those of other children in the protest.’¹¹ This quote does not belong to the benign, 1970s nostalgia of my multiculturalism as a child of post war European immigrants, nor to Australia’s convict past. This is a quote from a report on refugees held in detention camps in Australia at the end of the previous century. For Australians, the ‘foreigner’ still poses the philosophical problem of assessment. How do we identify the ‘foreigner’? Does the ‘foreigner’ merely breach the cartographic boundary, or is the ‘foreigner’ someone who resides amongst us, threatening the symbolic boundary: just as the bard’s unspeakable Jew, Shylock, threatens to mutilate the body of the Christian Antonio. In what ways do we reject or subscribe to kinship with him or her? ‘They’ stand outside the group identity, the glue that binds the ‘us’ together. Who is Subject and who is Other? Secondly there is the political problem – what do you do with the ‘foreigner’? ‘Should you subjugate the Other or be subjugated by him/her, live peaceably with the Other or apart from her, try to destroy the Other or fear destruction from him/her? ... Who, after all, is empowered to define the Subject and the Other? In whose interests are such identities, who profits from these definitions and who suffers?’¹² Does the white settler fear of aphanasis, the fear of the white settler child rendered speechless and terrified in an alien landscape lead him/her to inflict this terror on his/her Other? Does the archetypal lack of a natural inheritance, that Lacanian ‘a’, that unfillable desire, mean that the white settler must violently exclude the Other by banishing him/her or by being complicit in the loss of Other speech and languages? Is it a tragic requirement that the illegitimate child of Britain – the white settler – must abhor the Other to legitimate his/her future and valorise his/her past? And should this requirement be endorsed by culture, legislated by authority and enacted by symbolic violence in both its definition and its policy?

Historical UnAustralia

The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought.¹³

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Alexander Text of William Shakespeare, ed Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1978) III, i, 52-60, 237.

¹¹ Quoted in Gunew 55.

¹² Regina M Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 79.

¹³ Alfred Deakin (1901), quoted in Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 142.

Elaborating on the 'Other' from the standpoint of the 'anti discipline' of cultural studies, John Frow capitalizes the word as making 'a mythical One out of many'.¹⁴ Frow's interest lies with that social group 'from and for which knowledge of the objectified Other is produced'.¹⁵ The knowable Other is generated from within 'our' cultural framework, operating as a mirror image to tell us 'what we want know about ourselves'.¹⁶ Consequently, there can be no unmediated encounter with the Other; all that we really do is create an internal contrast to our own social framework, using our own language. Created within specific social systems, the 'Other' works like the shadow self in psychoanalysis, illuminating unexplored and often unacceptable parts of our own world. As definitions of the 'Other' are absorbed into that selfsame world, this system is changed. But the encounter with the 'Other' is always mediated by the cultural lens of the 'specular relationship'.¹⁷

When Australian Federation was enacted on January 1st, 1901 and 'chance was turned into destiny', the six Australian colonies united into a single nation.¹⁸ From its foundation, the Australian nation demanded recognition of both Australian-ness and unAustralian-ness. The new nation's constitution simultaneously denied citizenship, franchise and the right to serve in the armed forces to Africans, Asians, and Aboriginal people. 'Un-Australia' would contain those groups to be physically or symbolically excluded from national belonging – the collectivised 'Others'. However, with nationhood came the binding racial imperative of conferring membership to the nation. Australia was to be a white, sovereign and modern European state. In line with the Social Darwinism and racial determinism of the late nineteenth century, Australia was designated to become the protected reserve of the 'higher races'. As Carter explains:

Racialised thinking ... was pervasive in white or European societies by the turn of the century ... The key point in the Australian case is that racialised thinking organised around the core concepts of whiteness and Britishness, became absolutely fundamental to conceptions of the Australian nation. It was not so much Australians were 'racist' as that 'Australia' itself was a racialised idea.¹⁹

Australia looked to the new government to enforce the exclusion of inferior races by law. The Immigration Restriction Act was the first law passed by the new Australian parliament: the Act came to be known as the White Australia policy. Initially, undesirable races were excluded via means of a dictation test administered in a European language. By 1900 the majority of British subjects were Indians and Africans. Given their important strategic interests with China and Japan the British were keen to avoid any overt racial discrimination being encoded into Australian law.²⁰ The dictation test appeased Britain. Paul Kelly observes that historians have

¹⁴ John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 7, 3.

¹⁵ Frow 3.

¹⁶ Frow 3.

¹⁷ Frow 3.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* Second Edition (London: Verso, 1991) 19.

¹⁹ David Carter, *Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity: Issues in Australian Studies* (Sydney: Pearson Education Australia, 2006) 312.

²⁰ James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* Second Edition (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 10.

tended to apologise for or diminish the White Australia Policy because of its overt racism. However, the policy had 'near universal support and longevity' and was central to the 'Australian story'. Far from being deviant the policy was 'merely typical of its age'.²¹

In *Anxious Nation*, David Walker argues that the racialising drives in Australian nationalism 'would have been a good deal less intense, had it not been for the geo-political threat attributed to awakening Asia from the 1880s'.²² Thus, with the 'empty' continent of Australia so conveniently close, populous Asia emerged as Australia's pre-eminent threat, before and after Federation. A strongly expressed nationality was deemed crucial for the infant Australian nation – a weakly expressed nationality could only lead to an Asianised disaster. Is it any wonder then that racial purity and the imperative and pre-eminence of British ancestry (after all the British were the masters of an Empire that ruled a quarter of the world) became the touchstones of Australia's fledgling national culture? As well as labour protection, (cheap Asian labour was seen as a threat to the working man) and egalitarianism, Kelly links the 'powerful social and economic logic' of the White Australia policy to the founding of 'an enlightened, democratic, progressive Australia'.²³

From the very beginning this utopia was based on racialised thinking – it was utopia for the white man only. Whiteness of course evolved in definition over the decades of the White Australia policy. From Britishness and the initially accepted Protestant and Nordic peoples, it subsequently moved eastwards across Europe to include Greeks, Italians, Maltese and World War II European refugees. Like the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the Migration Act in 1958 which replaced it also did not mention race or the White Australia policy. Nonetheless, the Migration Act of 1958 perpetuated the White Australia policy for another ten years.²⁴

During the 1960s and the 1970s, the massive, post-war migration of non-British Europeans required Australians to reassess the pre-eminence they accorded to their British heritage. International conditions also challenged Australia's sense of 'nationness'. It became increasingly difficult for Australia to locate itself imaginatively and morally within the British Empire. Between the 1960s and the 1970s decolonisation and global migration escalated. International opinion condemned the regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. Further weakening ties to Britain, Australia took Japan as a major trading partner and the United States as a major military partner. Theories of political plurality were championed within the academy and Western democracies experienced a rise in activism: civil rights, the Vietnam peace movement and Aboriginal activism. Both nationally and globally Australia was being forced to redefine itself. In response to the need for change Australians elected the Whitlam government in 1972, ending 23 years of conservative liberal coalition government. Motivated by a reformist agenda, the Whitlam government introduced initiatives in key areas. Al Grassby, the Whitlam government's Minister of Immigration, is generally credited with pioneering Australian multiculturalism.²⁵

²¹ Paul Kelly, *100 Years: The Australian Story* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001) 52.

²² David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1999) 5.

²³ Kelly 52.

²⁴ Jupp 9.

²⁵ Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll view this as a simplistic analysis; see *Borderwork in Multicultural Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2006).

Australian multiculturalism is often seen as a response to Canadian multiculturalism which was adopted as state policy in Canada in 1971. Multiculturalism is a word devised to describe something that had not existed before, namely 'that cultures had relevance beyond the immigrant generation'.²⁶ However, Canadian and Australian multiculturalism had different histories and were driven by dissimilar imperatives. Lopez views the Canadian model as emphasising cultural maintenance and exchange whereas the Australian model was focussed primarily on migrant welfare.²⁷ Nonetheless, from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, multiculturalism became the accepted policy framework for managing Australia's post war diversity. This also established a tradition of treating "White –Aboriginal" relations and "Anglo–Ethnic" relations as two separate spheres of life' – a problematic convention that persists today.²⁸

On the other hand, from the early 1980s onwards the Australian political climate was changing. As the ambassador of disaffected conservative opinion, the journal *Quadrant* had been critical of multiculturalism from the early 1980s onwards. However, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's enthusiastic support had kept conservative opposition at bay. Electoral defeat and the prospect of long years of Labour government bought the conservative critics out in force from the mid 1980's onwards. In 1984 Professor Geoffrey Blainey aired his ambivalence toward Asian migration and published *All for Australia*, a volume which was highly critical of multiculturalism – the 'Asian' part of it in particular.²⁹ He coined the term 'ethnic payola' to refer to the grants and subsidies being distributed to ethnic organisations. Further denunciation of multiculturalism came from Katharine Betts, an academic who published the influential *Ideology and Immigration* in 1988.³⁰

UnAustralia 1988-2008

We've drawn back from being too obsessed with diversity to a point where Australians are now better able to appreciate the enduring values of the national character that we proudly celebrate and preserve. We've moved on from a time when multiculturalism, in the words of the historian Gregory Melleuish, came to be associated with 'the transformation of Australia from a bad old Australia that was xenophobic, racist and monocultural to a good new Australia that is culturally diverse, tolerant and exciting'. Such a view was always a distortion and a caricature. Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them. In Australia's case, that dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian

²⁶ Jupp 80.

²⁷ Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 117.

²⁸ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation* (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 1998) 24.

²⁹ Geoffrey Blainey, *All for Australia* (North Ryde NSW: Methuen Haynes 1984).

³⁰ Katharine Betts, *Ideology and Immigration: Australia 1976-1987* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1988). This was later revised and republished as *The Great Divide: immigration politics in Australia* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 1999).

ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture.³¹

Celebrating two hundred years of British settlement, Australia had its bicentennial year in 1988. Moreover, this was the year when then opposition leader John Howard refused his support to the Bicentennial Multicultural Foundation and addressed the Canberra Press Club about his opposition to this 'aimless, divisive' multicultural policy which had 'profound weaknesses'.³² He also spoke out against Asian immigration saying that it should be 'slowed down' in the interests of 'social cohesion' and developed his critique of multiculturalism by espousing his concept of One Australia.³³ Howard's views were adopted as party platform with the release of the coalition's immigration and ethnic affairs policy on August 22, 1988. By ominous coincidence, as Australia celebrated 200 years of British settlement, bi-partisan support for multiculturalism was withdrawn. By then however, protest about the bi-centennial celebrations had escalated. Australia Day 1988 in Sydney 'saw the largest ever protest march by Aborigines and their supporters'.³⁴ Howard lost the 1989 election and was removed as opposition leader, only to return as Prime Minister in 1996. During that seven year interval, conservative criticism of multiculturalism continued to be both insistent and influential. Often, the debate was fuelled by the culture wars in the United States where multiculturalism was embroiled in the right/left divide and the political correctness (PC) controversy which surrounds cultural pluralism. In Australia, on the conservative side, the debate was fuelled by politicians (John Howard), academics (Katharine Betts and Geoffrey Blainey), and journalist cum opinion makers (Paul Sheehan, Alan Jones, David Barnett etc). Small as they were, levels of Asian immigration to Australia were the flashpoint for this political turn to the right. On the basis of deep-seated and long-standing fears directed towards Asia, multicultural policies stalled at the first hurdle.

By the 1990s, given the impact of the Mabo and Wik decisions, Indigenous issues took centre stage, becoming the pivotal political and ethical questions of the *fin de siècle* decade. For the first time in Australian history, the High Court of Australia recognised the existence of Native Title over both water and land. If culture is understood 'as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practises of symbolic representation',³⁵ then a fundamental basis of the claim to nationhood – the unquestioned tie of a people to their land which gives them the right to practice *their* culture – was irrevocably undermined for non-Indigenous Australians in the 1990s. As a result, the question of unresolved territorial ownership: 'Land = society = nation = culture = religion'³⁶ both preoccupied and confronted the space wherein 'Australian' culture was practised. Meantime, an 'uneasy conversation' continued to exist between multicultural, white settler and Indigenous agendas where: 'Whites relating to Aboriginal people appear as totally unaffected by multiculturalism

³¹ John Howard, *Address to the National Press Club*, 25 Jan 2006

<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10052/20060321-0000/www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1754.html>

³² Jupp 106.

³³ Jupp 107.

³⁴ Carter 101.

³⁵ John Tomlinson, *Globalisation and Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999) 18.

³⁶ Tomlinson 5.

while the “Anglos” relating to the ethnics appear as if they have no Aboriginal question about which to worry’.³⁷

On top of this, Australians had to face the challenges of economic globalisation, ‘the free movement of capital, goods and labour’: flows which made the boundaries of the nation state much more permeable and subject to ‘economic and social forces which no nation-state can control’.³⁸ Confronted with uncertainty about the boundaries of their anthropological space, Australians previously sustained by the once common understandings of the equation of ‘Land = society = nation = culture = religion’ became ferociously protective of their borders. They responded to threatened boundaries – both symbolic and real – by electing the conservative Howard government to office in 1996.

The Howard era oversaw the ferocious fortification of symbolic and geographic (but not economic) boundaries.³⁹ Socially, this led to such turbulence as the rise of Hansonism, aboriginal riots in Redfern, ethnic riots in Cronulla (which had worldwide coverage), and a series of vindictively administered asylum seeker incidents which also gained international attention. Following the events of September 11th, 2001 and ‘the clash of civilisations’, Australia also identified with its traditional partners, Britain and America, in joining the war against the ‘axis of evil’. The end of the Howard years also oversaw highly contentious ventures into ‘coercive reconciliation’ with Australia’s Indigenous population.⁴⁰ Consequently, in Australia from the mid-1990s onwards, race acquired a different meaning. Reasserting ‘old Australian values’ also meant Australians reverted to what Hodge and O’Carroll call the ‘bad new regressive policies’ of the White Australia policy.⁴¹ As this was White Australia for the new millennium, and not Federation, the terms of exclusion shifted from race to culture, as David Stratton explains: ‘Where previously race operated as a reductive concept and was thought to determine culture, now culture is the more privileged term and race is thought to be a signifier of culture’.⁴² As it was no longer appropriate to refer to undesirable races, undesirability and non-assimilability became characteristics now more properly attributable to cultures: cultures unsuited or incapable of penetrating or adapting to Australia’s symbolic and geographic borders.⁴³ In 1999, on the eve of the new millennium, Australians rejected the idea of becoming a republic. Australia chose instead to remain identified with Britain. Today, the British Queen still remains as Australia’s Queen, which links the country to the baggage of colonialism within its own geographic region. Although this essay does not want to reduce Australian literary form to national allegory, it does contend that literary production is not only part of nation forming but also an important aspect of its imaginative realisation. The last part of this essay goes on to ask about the sort of pressures that are being brought to bear on Australian literary production in the present climate of Australian ‘nation-ness’.

³⁷ Hage 24.

³⁸ Alastair Davidson, ‘The Politics of Exclusion in an Era of Globalisation,’ in *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*, eds. Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2003) 130.

³⁹ George Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2006) 289.

⁴⁰ For a fuller discussion see: Jon Altman, and Melinda Hinkson, eds. *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 2007).

⁴¹ Hodge and O’Carroll 16.

⁴² Jon Stratton, *Race Daze* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998) 11.

⁴³ Stratton 11.

UnAustralia: Literature and Ethnography

On the one hand, especially since the 1990s, I think we've begun to see Australian literary studies in historical perspective as a discipline whose origins lie in a period that in certain respects we no longer feel to be contemporary. This has to do, amongst other things, with our changing attitudes to issues of nation, race and gender.⁴⁴

'All literature is ethnography', responded Leigh Dale to my query regarding the appropriate domain for Australian literature in 2006.⁴⁵ In other words, those engaged as stakeholders in the national literary system, in whatever capacity – review, theory, teaching, criticism, writing or publication – are ethnographers of some sort or another, as well as literary specialists. Working from the discipline of anthropology, Arjun Appadurai takes this even further, coining the neologism *ethnoscape*:

This neologism has certain ambiguities deliberately built into it. It refers, first, to the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must confront and it admits and it admits that (as with landscapes in visual art) traditions of perception and perspective, as well as variations in the situation of the observer may affect the process and product of representation.⁴⁶

In themselves, the processes and products of a national literary culture form a literary *ethnoscape*, where the perceptions of the observer, be they writer, critic, or judge, affect the literary representations that are permitted, endorsed or even celebrated within a culture. The opposite of course also true: the literary observer's positioning also determines what is *not* given prominence, authorisation and validity within a national literary culture. For much of the 20th century, the *ethnoscape* produced by those teaching literature within Australia's tertiary institutions was one of obligatory cultural symbiosis with Britain. In her landmark study *The English Men*, Dale argues that anxiety about being perceived as 'colonial' permeated the 'discipline of English in Australia for the first century of its operation': identifying with the cultural and intellectual elite meant being able to 'pass for English'.⁴⁷ Ultimately Dale concludes that this dependence on Britain subsequently retarded 'the development of Australian literary culture inside and outside the academy'.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Robert Dixon, 'Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production,' *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 3 (2004): 28.

⁴⁵ Presentation to UTAS Postgraduates 15th September, 2006:
http://www.utas.edu.au/ejel/graduate_research/docs/Leigh_Dale.pdf

⁴⁶ Arjun Appadurai, 'Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology' *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Sante Fe: School of American Research Press 1991) 191.

⁴⁷ Leigh Dale, *The English Men: Professing Literature in Australian Universities* (Toowoomba: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1997) 1.

⁴⁸ Dale 1.

For Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths, in post colonial societies it is the contact/creation with the 'Other' which enables the realisation of identity. Hence, settler societies like Australia are 'constituted by their difference from the metropolitan and it is in this relationship that identity both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self assertion comes into being'.⁴⁹ During her undergraduate years, the sighting of the manuscript version of George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* inspired political scientist Judith Brett to voice a newfound awareness of an alternative literary *ethnoscape* for Australians. Brett is inspired by Eliot: she 'wrote of her own experiences of people, landscapes, seasons and language. I realised, that is, that books are written within people's experience of a real material world. And that some people read books about places that they actually know. This changed my whole way of reading literature'.⁵⁰ Brett's experience was echoed by others of that generation who entered Australian universities in the 1960s to discover that their undergraduate education 'included very little about Australian culture, society and history'.⁵¹ However, from the 1970s onwards Australian literature was revived from the cultural cringe and rehabilitated into university curricula, creating a new literary *ethnoscape* for a generation of Australians.⁵²

Concurrent with this newfound awareness of the value of Australian cultural life were the tensions inherent the dyad of 'centre' and 'periphery', derived from postcolonial theory, as proposed by Tiffin, Griffiths and Ashcroft. Consequently, long after the actual moment of colonisation, the theory of postcolonialism with its paradigm of 'colonialism as a set of institutions, ideas and habits' persisted to become pervasive in Australian literary studies.⁵³ This led one literary critic to complain about the 2006 shortlist for the Miles Franklin Prize:

That all five novels on the list were works of historical fiction might be little more than coincidence, but it underlines the extent to which contemporary Australian literature is preoccupied with the past. A debate has been simmering for several years about the health of Australia's literary culture, and a recurring complaint is that too few novelists are prepared to grapple with the reality of modern Australia. Too many novels, it has been suggested, take refuge in what one critic called the 'soft glow' of history, safely quarantined from the social and political transformations that have taken place over the past decade.⁵⁴

However, Carter recognises theories of post colonialism, feminism and multiculturalism as shifting Australian literary studies beyond the national frame.⁵⁵ He also credits postcolonial theory with moving literary criticism into 'textual politics: reading beyond questions of literary value to those connected with the politics of race,

⁴⁹ Quoted in Bruce Bennett, 'Nation and Literary History,' *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*, ed. Bruce Bennett (Perth: Australia Research Institute, 2006) 96.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ann Curthoys, 'Windows onto the Worlds: Studying Australia at Tertiary Level (1987): A Reconsideration,' *Thinking Australian Studies: Teaching Across Cultures*, eds. David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith and Gus Worby (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press 2004) 61.

⁵¹ Curthoys 61.

⁵² Curthoys 62.

⁵³ David Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism,' *Meanjin* 66:2 (2007) 114.

⁵⁴ James Ley, 'When the Past Isn't Past,' *The Times* (19 May, 2006) sec *Times Literary Supplement* 23.

⁵⁵ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 115.

class, gender and colonisation'.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Carter also regards post colonial literary criticism in Australia as being primarily of a 'utopian sort' and its metaphors as generally being 'aesthetic & psychoanalytical'.⁵⁷ In other contexts, South Asia and the Caribbean for example, post colonial literary studies have been much more 'robust and worldly' in their applications, speaking more urgently to the present through their 'purchase on history'.⁵⁸ For Carter, the truly illuminating work on colonisation in Australia has been done outside the discipline of literary studies by academics who 'have not been postcolonial theorists in the stricter disciplinary sense of the term'. This includes figures such as Stephen Muecke, Ann Curthoys, Paul Carter, Henry Reynolds, John Hirst and Marilyn Lake, among others.⁵⁹

In many ways, the ongoing dialogue between 'centre' and 'periphery' favoured by postcolonial theorists simultaneously challenged and bound Australia to the imperial centre and the enabling/disabling energy directed to its 'peripheries'. It is debatable whether the conservative form of criticism, which David Carter identifies as favoured by postcolonial literary critics in Australia, mirrored the conservative turn that Australia took as a society in the 1990s. Regardless, Carter argues for a theory of *post-postcolonialism* which looks at a 'transnational process of simultaneous, if differentiated developments', one which does not 'condemn the colonies to perpetual belatedness ... [and] therefore always derivative'.⁶⁰ Ashcroft similarly wants to celebrate the 'circulatory energies' of globalisation rather than the energies of imperialism: 'Globalisation is the radical *transformation* of imperialism, continually reconstituted, and interesting precisely because it stems from no obvious imperial centre ... Globalism obtains its energy from its very diffusion, global culture making itself at home in motion rather than in a place, quite unlike the energy of imperial control'.⁶¹ As this essay was being finalised, Geordie Williamson also celebrated Australia's cosmopolitan literature and the space that 'globalised, transnational literature' seems to have found in Australia.⁶² In any case, the desire remains for Australia to not always remain a 'derivative' outpost of the imperial centre and retain the capacity to respond global culture thus 'making itself at home in motion rather place'. *Transnational* still demands a 'national'. However, Williamson celebrates the death of a distinctive antipodean canon which has seen a reduction of students studying Australian literature.

Yet, a *transnational* environment demands a category of Australian literature, whether that is defined as literature by Australians, literature written in Australia, literature written by Australians overseas, or literature by 'foreigners' in Australia. What is in contention is the nature of the composition of the body of Australian literature in a new era, for to participate in a *transnational* environment demands a definition of the 'national'. It is this very problem with the 'national' that led to the restrictive border controls (symbolic and real) of Australia in the past twenty years. Prime Minister John Howard rightly sought to define the nation for the new century. However, his conservative government proved unable to move beyond Federation and

⁵⁶ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 115.

⁵⁷ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 115.

⁵⁸ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 115.

⁵⁹ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 115-116.

⁶⁰ Carter, 'After Post-Colonialism' 117.

⁶¹ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001) 213.

⁶² Geordie Williamson, 'Wider World in Their Sights,' *The Weekend Australian* (23-24 May 2009) Review 16.

Menzies-era values. Is Australia to remain a 'parvenu', forever indebted and attached to its British diaspora, willing to sacrifice its distinctiveness by adopting these same values? Or will Australia become a 'pariah' and seek the independent status of republican nationhood? Will Australia attain a status that will allow the nation to champion its greatest ideals – whatever they are agreed to be – whilst acknowledging its failures? An ongoing debate about the *ethnoscape* of Australian literature, its 'Others', and the rightful composition of an antipodean canon can only inform the necessary republican debates of the future. The recent, welcome publication of the *PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* reinvigorated the discussion about the appropriateness of Australia's literary and cultural heritage as the nation headed into a new millennium.⁶³ Far from being dead, Australian literature is due for a resurrection and a 'republican' debate of its very own.

⁶³ Imre Salusinszky, 'Stuffing the Canon Can Lead to Blow-Ups,' *The Australian* (12 September 2009) News Review 8.